

Overlooked historical testimony as to the presence of Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaeton aethereus* in French Guiana

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The historical presence of Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaeton aethereus* in French Guiana has attracted some discussion in the ornithological literature. Tostain *et al.* (1992) stated: ‘The work of the naturalist painter Ogier de Gombaud (Haverschmidt 1957) illustrates indisputably that a species of red-billed tropicbird *Phaeton* sp. (*aethereus*?) nested at least until the early 19th century on the Grand Connétable Island. It has since disappeared...’. Describing and commenting on a manuscript by de Gombaud and the painter’s watercolours from 1803–09, Haverschmidt (1957) mentioned that ‘The seabirds of the genera *Sula*, *Phaeton* and *Fregata* are particularly interesting. It seems that de Gombaud had contacts on the islands off the coast of Cayenne’, although the latter possibility seems unlikely as the islands have apparently always been uninhabited (J. Ingels *in litt.* 2005). Ogier de Gombaud’s drawing was thus treated as the sole proof of the presence ‘until the early nineteenth century’ of this species in French Guiana.

More concrete proof of the presence of *Phaeton aethereus* on Grand Connétable does, however exist, albeit largely ignored. The Polish naturalist, Konstanty Jelski (1837–96) spent four years in French Guiana. However, more than a century has passed since the only Polish edition of his memoirs of French Guiana was published, in 1898, and Jelski’s work in the country nevertheless remains largely unknown, even amongst specialists. Those authors who do mention him usually refer to his stay in Peru (Boubier 1925) and his important contribution to the *Ornithologie du Pérou* (Vuilleumier 2003). For Władysław Taczanowski (1819–90), the Polish zoologist, Jelski was one of the most important sources of specimens of Neotropical avifauna, and he played a major role in acquiring collections of animals and in furthering knowledge of South American natural history. A great many of his vertebrates were sent to Warsaw, including 480 bird species, *c.*200 of which were new for French Guiana and 60 new to science (Wąsowska & Wiszniewska-Ślepińska 1996). Many of the great naturalists of the latter half of the 19th century worked on material Jelski despatched to Europe, dedicating several names in his honour. The mammals were described by K. Peters of Berlin and O. Thomas of the British Museum, birds by W. Taczanowski, P. L. Sclater and O. Salvin of London, and J. L. Cabanis of Berlin, fish, amphibians and reptiles by A. Günther of the British Museum and F. Steindachner of the Natural History Museum, Wien, molluscs by W. Lubomirski, spiders by W. Taczanowski (who described 200 species and nine genera), crustaceans by A. Wrzesniowski of Warsaw University, lepidoptera by C.

Oberthür of Rennes, Staphylinidae by S. Solski of St Petersburg and orthoptera by I. Bolívar of Madrid (Wąsowska & Wiszniewska-Ślepińska 1996).

Jelski's memoirs recount his visit to Grand Connétable in 1867: 'We quickly moved on for all, including the captain, wished to visit Grand Connétable, a rocky islet inhabited by seabirds. We had to arrive there quite early as we were accompanied by an engineer who wished visit the site with a view to constructing a future lighthouse.

'The closer we got to the rock, the more the air was full of birds. When we dropped anchor the birds surrounded us on all sides. Mr Payen, the ship's doctor, started shooting and the birds dropped onto the deck of the boat. The majority were Brown Booby [*Sula leucogaster*]. There were also many Sooty Terns [*Sterna fuscata*] but also frigates [*Fregata magnificens*, of which a juvenile still exists in Warsaw, taken on Grand Connétable in 1867] and Phaetons (*Phaeton aethereus*).'

'After we landed we climbed a grassy slope so densely covered with tern nests that we had to be careful not to tread on the eggs. The sailors filled a few buckets with these eggs. I was greatly saddened by this destruction but it was impossible to explain anything to these simple folk. They could only think of food. They had no interest in birds except insofar as they could eat them. They were totally indifferent to the question of the survival of a species [form]. The men even destroyed more than they could possibly eat. [...]'

'The frigates and the other large birds settled in another place. They permitted themselves be grabbed by the neck or be beaten to death with clubs. I thus managed to catch a fine *Phaeton* that was still alive. It was perched on the edge of a rock in a slightly isolated place. It was a white bird with silky feathers and marked with little perpendicular black lines. It had a powerful reddish beak and two long feathers in its tail'.

The Polish Academy of Science, in Warsaw, has an important collection of specimens that Jelski sent from French Guiana, including 409 birds (D. Mierzwa *in litt.*). Among them are three *Phaeton aethereus*, two of which from French Guiana, described as from 'Cayenna', with one dated 1867 (the third specimen is from Brazil). Formal proof therefore exists as to the species' presence on Grand Connétable in the latter half of the 19th century.

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Hybridisation between Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* and Rough-legged Buzzard *B. lagopus* in Norway

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A mixed pair (male) Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* and (female) Rough-legged Buzzard *B. lagopus* successfully fledged three young near Trondheim in the county of Sør-Trøndelag, central Norway, in summer 2005. *B. lagopus* is a common breeder in this area in years with high numbers of small rodents, and occurs through much of Norway, usually in mountains and higher elevation forests, but sometimes also in lower forested areas. *B. buteo* has not previously been found nesting in Sør-Trøndelag county, although some previous observations are suggestive of breeding, and there is a confirmed nesting in Nord-Trøndelag county. In Norway, the species occurs in lowlands of the south and south-east (Gjershaug *et al.* 1994).

There are very few records of mixed pairs of *Buteo* species in the wild (Gray 1958, Panov 1998, Clark & Witt in press). An escaped Red-tailed Hawk *B. jamaicensis* mated with a *B. buteo* and produced fertile eggs in Scotland in 1969 (Murray 1970), and a mixed pair, involving a presumed escaped Red-backed Hawk *B. polyosoma* and a Swainson's Hawk *B. swainsoni* bred for more than eight years in Colorado, USA (Allen 1988, Wheeler 1988). Hybridisation between *B. lagopus* and Swainson's Hawk was documented in Louisiana, USA, based on DNA analysis of a specimen (Clark & Witt in press), a probable hybrid between the same two species was photographed in Texas, and hybrids between *B. lagopus* and *B. jamaicensis* described from Colorado and California (Clark *et al.* in prep.). Mixed pairing of Red-shouldered Hawk *B. lineatus* and Grey Hawk *B. nitidus* has been reported from Texas (Lasley 1989). Hybridisation between Upland Buzzard *B. hemilasius* and Long-legged Buzzard *B. rufinus* is known from Central Asia